

ILLINOIS ATTORNEY GENERAL KWAME RAOUL

PRESS



RELEASE

www.IllinoisAttorneyGeneral.gov

For Immediate Release
March 30, 2020

Media Contact: Annie Thompson
217-524-4173
pthompson@atg.state.il.us
@ILAttyGeneral

*****CONSUMER ALERT*****

ATTORNEY GENERAL RAOUL WARNS RESIDENTS OF COVID-19 SCAMS

Chicago — Attorney General Kwame Raoul is alerting Illinois residents to a wave of COVID-19 scams occurring as a result of the coronavirus pandemic. Raoul is urging consumers to exercise caution before responding to solicitations for money or personal information that are tied to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Raoul warns the public that unsolicited requests for money by purported charitable organizations or requests for personal information by individuals claiming to represent public health agencies actually could be scams. According to Raoul, attorneys general around the country are receiving reports about several different scams, including cyber scams, telephone and text messaging scams, counterfeit product offers, bogus door-to-door offers of tests and products related to the coronavirus, and solicitations for donations to phony charities.

The Attorney General's office is partnering with the U.S. attorneys' offices for the Northern, Central and Southern Districts of Illinois to fight fraud related to the pandemic. Additionally, Raoul's office is in contact with state's attorneys throughout Illinois and the Illinois State Police in order to collaborate to protect Illinois residents from criminal fraud during the coronavirus outbreak.

"It is absolutely reprehensible that individuals would seek to use the coronavirus public health crisis to defraud the people of Illinois, and I will not hesitate to use the authority of my office and partnerships with state, local and federal law enforcement to hold accountable anyone seeking to profit off this pandemic," Raoul said. "It is disheartening that a warning is necessary, but because we know scams are making the rounds, I am urging Illinois residents to be vigilant and report any COVID-19 scams to the Attorney General's office."

According to Raoul, scams being reported to his office and those of attorneys general around the country include:

Cyber Scams

Attorney General Raoul is urging people to be wary of all emails claiming to be from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), World Health Organization (WHO), and other health care organizations, offering to share information about the virus. Do not open attachments or click on links within these emails, as scammers are using phony COVID-19 tracking websites to infect electronic devices with malware, putting residents at risk for identity theft and financial exploitation.

Be on the lookout for emails asking for the verification of personal data, including Medicare or Medicaid information, in exchange for receiving economic stimulus funds or other benefits from the government. Government agencies are **NOT** sending out emails asking for residents' personal information in order to receive funds or other pandemic relief opportunities.

Only visit websites with clearly-distinguishable URL addresses. Scammers seek to direct web traffic to similar, but falsely-identified website names where they can provide misinformation or attempt to gain consumers' personal information or finances in exchange for pandemic updates.

Telephone and Text Messaging Scams

As more individuals are working from home, possibly responding to a larger volume of phone calls, it may be more difficult to ignore calls from unknown numbers. Hang up immediately if you inadvertently answer a robocall. Scammers are offering everything from COVID-19 treatments and cures, to work-from-home schemes. Even if the call recording says that pressing a number will direct you to a live operator or even remove you from the call list, it may actually lead to more robocalls.

Similar to email phishing scams, text messages from unknown sources may include hyperlinks to what appear to be automated pandemic updates, or interactive infection maps. These can allow scammers to install malware on your mobile electronic devices, so you should immediately delete such messages.

Counterfeit Product Offers & High-Demand Goods

Ignore offers for COVID-19 vaccinations and home test kits that are made online, in stores, through electronic messages or over the phone. Currently, no vaccines, pills, potions, lotions, medications, or other prescription or over-the-counter products are available to treat or cure the Coronavirus disease. Products such as chlorine dioxide, hydroxychloroquine, essential oils, colloidal silver, elderberry and garlic will not prevent against or cure COVID-19. Additionally, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has not authorized any home test kits for COVID-19.

Attorney General Raoul has urged people to buy only what they need and not to hoard consumer goods, including household cleaning products, sanitizers, personal hygiene products, and health and medical supplies that have been in extreme demand. If purchasing these products online, research the seller by searching online for the person or company's name, phone number and email address, plus words like "review," "complaint" or "scam." Pay using a credit card as opposed to debit, and keep a record of the transaction.

Over the last couple of weeks, Raoul's office has received approximately 750 complaints related to price gouging, and the Attorney General's office will utilize its authority under the Consumer

Fraud and Deceptive Business Practices Act to address any unfair pricing that is prohibited under the law. To report unfair pricing, please visit the Attorney General's website at www.illinoisattorneygeneral.gov.

Bogus Door-to-Door Tests and Virus-related Products

In the interest of safety, Attorney General Raoul is urging residents to **NOT** answer the door or allow into their residences any unknown individuals or business representatives going door-to-door offering consumer products, medical kits, vaccines, cures, whole-home sanitization or in-person COVID-19 testing. Instead, contact local law enforcement and, if possible, alert neighbors, particularly seniors.

Phony Charities & Donation Requests

Attorney General Raoul also says people should exercise caution when donating to charitable causes connected to the COVID-19 outbreak and find out how their donation will be utilized. Under Illinois law, fundraisers and charitable organizations are required to register each year with the Attorney General's office. The Attorney General's office provides important financial information about charities, including income, expenditures and programs. Please contact the Attorney General's [Charitable Trust Bureau](#) or visit ConsumerResources.org for tips on being an informed donor. For instance, always make donations using a credit card or other secure payment processor. **NEVER** donate via a gift card, wire transfer or other anonymous electronic payment processor.

Attorney General Raoul also is reminding people to follow guidance issued by the Illinois Department of Public Health, the CDC, the World Health Organization and other public health agencies.

Raoul encourages people to report scams connected to the COVID-19 outbreak by visiting the [Attorney General's website](#). In addition, donors to report suspicious solicitations to his office's Charitable Trust Bureau at 312-814-2595 (TTY: 1-800-964-3013).